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SUBJECT: THE EU AND CENTRAL ASIA: PREPARING FOR THE COEST
TROIKA

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Classified By: Political Officer Marisa Plowden for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Summary: Since the EU formally adopted a new strategy for Central Asia in June, it has been working to increase Member State focus on the region and generate interest in the implementation of the strategy. EU priorities in Central Asia include energy, demarcation and respect for borders, and promotion of democracy and human rights. According to our contacts, the Central Asians place water management and education on the top of their agenda with the EU. The October 29 U.S.-EU COEST troika on Central Asia will provide an opportunity for us to discuss these questions with an aim of focusing the EU on our priorities in the region. End Summary.

EU STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL ASIA

12. (U) The EU strategy for a new partnership with Central Asia, adopted by the European Council in June, serves as an overall framework for EU relations with Central Asia, including in human rights, rule of law, good governance and democracy, education, economic development, trade and investment, energy and transport, environmental policies, migration, and inter-cultural dialogue. While the strategy defines the EU's priorities for its cooperation with the region as a whole, implementation will be tailored to the specific requirements and performance of each Central Asian country. Since the strategy was adopted, EU institutions and Member States have begun to identify priority areas for its implementation. At the same time, senior EU officials have been discussing the strategy with their Central Asian counterparts, including during a visit by High Representative Javier Solana to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan October 8-10. (A link to the strategy can be found at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu>.)

EU PRIORITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA

13. (C) When asked the EU's top five priorities for increasing engagement in Central Asia, Council Secretariat contacts

named: energy; borders; environment; rule of law -- including democratic standards and human rights; and economic cooperation and good governance. (Note: while education is an important area for the EU, contacts said there were already a number of existing programs in education so it was more a matter of utilizing those rather than increasing activity, as they want to do in the five priority areas.)

WHAT THE CENTRAL ASIANS WANT FROM THE EU

14. (C) In EU discussions with Central Asian countries, the Central Asians prioritized water management and education above all else, according to Council Secretariat contacts.

REGIONAL LINKAGES

15. (C) The EU strategy for Central Asia states that a regional approach is suitable for tackling common regional challenges such as organized crime, human, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism and non-proliferation issues, inter-cultural dialogue, energy, environmental pollution, water management, migration as well as border management and transport infrastructure. Council Secretariat contacts have also told us that there is increasing awareness in the EU of the importance of linkages between the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. In fact, the Council Secretariat uses Afghanistan as a way to convince Member States of the importance of greater engagement in Central Asia, noting that positive developments in Central Asia will help improve the situation in Afghanistan.

16. (C) While the EU Strategy does not explicitly address cooperation with third countries, it does state the EU's intention to cooperate with international financial

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institutions and multilateral and regional organizations and institutions. During our consultations on OSCE issues with the EU in June 2007 (reftel) we had an unsatisfying conversation with the EU regarding the OSCE role in the region. The EU implied that it wished to keep more high profile activities in Central Asia for itself, essentially leaving the "crumbs" for the OSCE to pick up. .

WHERE THE USG FITS IN - MIXED VIEWS IN BRUSSELS

17. (C) EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel meets regularly with U.S. officials and appears genuinely open to extensive cooperation with the United States on Central Asia. Working-level Council Secretariat contacts also see a variety of areas where the U.S. and the EU could improve or increase cooperation in the region, including border security and water management. In the third-country vein, the Germans reportedly have already discussed cooperation on water management with the Japanese at senior levels. Contacts also see room for more cooperation in the areas of education and economic cooperation and good governance -- i.e. standards, practices, regulations, administration, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. A Council Secretariat source did not discount the possibility of further cooperation on energy. (Note: this COEST troika will not be the right forum for discussing energy cooperation in depth, as the key EU players on that issue will not likely be present at the meeting. We may, however, want to consider increasing our focus on this topic in future COEST troika sessions.)

18. (C) Based on conversations with several regional experts in the European Commission's External Relations Directorate General (RELEX), there are varying degrees of enthusiasm in the Commission for cooperating with the United States in the region. Some are skeptical and wary, while others see the value of increased cooperation. The recent backtracking by

the European Commission on its initial support for cooperating with us under the Asian Development Bank's CAREC plus 3 initiative is illustrative of this ambivalence.

¶9. (C) Commission contacts directly involved in the CAREC plus 3 discussions asked that the USG not interpret their response to our proposed CAREC plus 3 joint demarche as a signal that they did not want to cooperate, but rather that they simply needed to discuss the matter internally further, especially as it involved agreeing to a formal joint demarche. However, the same contacts acknowledged that in some areas the EU may generally be reluctant to cooperate visibly with the U.S. due to their concern about how Russia might respond to a perceived "western bloc" in the region. They noted that the EU has worked hard to make the Russians comfortable with the EU Central Asia strategy, and they want to keep it that way. With this in mind, Commission contacts suggested that in some areas, they might be more comfortable with more informal, low-profile cooperation with the United States, such as supporting events that one another organize in the region and sharing demarche points on human rights.

¶10. (C) One Commission official not directly involved in the CAREC plus 3 discussions noted that the Council Secretariat, rather than the Commission, had been the main actor during the lead-up to adoption of the Central Asian strategy. The Germans -- in the EU presidency at the time -- had also played an unusually large role, with a lot of the discussions occurring in Berlin. Consequently, it was possible the Commission had not yet gotten its own house in order. Continuing internal deliberations over the new strategy were making it difficult to move to a stage where the institution could coordinate with third parties. The same contact, on the other hand, warned that some in the EU may feel competitive with the United States and want to safeguard its own strategy. Finally, still other Commission contacts noted that within RELEX, there continues to exist among some a general anti-U.S. bias and a preference for going it alone.

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